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IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY, (U)  
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## IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

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This paper will outline five sets of questions on the current foreign policy of the revolutionary regime in Iran. These include foreign-policy decision-making; the Iraq-Iran war; Iran-Soviet relations; U.S.-Iran relations and the overall direction of Iran's foreign policy. None of these can be probed in depth here, but salient features of each will be summarized on the basis of my oral presentation to the Department on March 19.

### The Making of Foreign Policy

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Obviously, given the continuing domestic power struggle and the overall revolutionary instability, Iran can not be considered an effective unitary actor in international affairs today. Yet, decisions are being made and implemented, no matter how fragmented the political system. Throughout the twentieth century, in periods of similar domestic political disarray and profound economic dislocation, the Iranian capacity to make and execute foreign policy decisions has diminished, but has not disappeared. In the course of this revolution the same has been the case, for example, in the hostage dispute and the Iraq-Iran war.

The Ayatollah Khomeini continues to act as the supreme decision-maker, despite a reduced degree of involvement in

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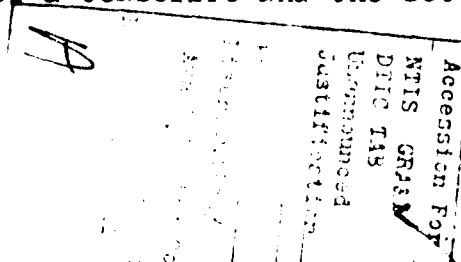


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domestic and foreign affairs. All major decisions receive either his prior authorization or final approval. Under the circumstances the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not unlike other arms of the bureaucracy, suffers from depleted personnel. The Ministry continues to operate without a Foreign Minister, and Iran's high-level representation has been reduced to five ambassadors abroad. The Defense Council formally considers war-related decisions and strategies, but Bani-Sadr, Col. Fakouri, and Gen. Fallahi enjoy direct access to Khomeini, seek his general guidance, and report to him on major developments. Khomeini also has his own representative on the Defense Council. Since the release of the hostages, Raja'i and Behzad Nabavi, who played prominent roles in that dispute, seem to have adopted a low profile in foreign affairs. Within the Majlis, Hojatalislam Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khomeini (the latter is the head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee) have taken minor initiatives in state visits abroad, but attempted discussions on the "guiding principles" of Iranian foreign policy have bogged down time and again.

The fragmented nature of decision-making in the field of foreign affairs has, above all, entailed extraordinary delays in arriving at decisions and undertaking effective implementation. The internal power struggle, personal antagonism, factional strife and ideological conflicts hamper the decision-making process as they do now over the terms of a ceasefire and the settlement of the Iraq-Iran conflict.



### The Iraq-Iran War

In two memoranda to the Department (May 16 and October 10, 1980), the basic elements of the conflict and the causes, nature and timing of the war were set forth previously and do not require repetition here. On the surface, all efforts toward a settlement have so far failed, but those of the Islamic Conference Committee should not be written off prematurely. In this connection the following points are worth considering:

1. Although both parties seem to have rejected the Committee's proposals, there are strong indications that the door is still open for further mediation as stated by the Committee Chairmand and Bani-Sadr's acknowledgement of positive elements in the proposals.

2. Iran's sine qua non condition for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Iraqi troops to prewar borders, and that of Iraq, the exercise of "full sovereignty" over the Shatt al-Arab, would appear to be irreconcilable. But a quid pro quo formula could be developed, I think, more clearly out of the Committee proposals. Iraq launched the war, to be sure, to unseat the Khomeini regime, but having failed in that objective so far, and fearing the domestic cost of a prolonged and inconclusive war, it may be ready to settle for an Iranian commitment to observe all the security provisions of the 1975 treaty and the related protocols as a means of containing the so-called "export" of the Iranian revolution in return for its own commitment to submit the

determination of the boundary line in the river to third-party judgment. Regardless of the outcome of such a judgment, both parties would agree in advance to the principle of freedom of navigation in the river, which has always been considered a separate issue from the boundary line under the 1975 treaty and previous agreements.

3. The war issue, as the hostage dispute, is tied up with the internal power struggle. The relatively powerful Beheshti-Rafsanjani-Raja'i triumvirate is taking a hard line on the Islamic Conference Committee proposals, as might have been expected. But Khomeini reaffirmed the powers of Bani-Sadr as the commander-in-chief. Importantly, he did so in the recent crisis triggered by the March 5 disturbances at the University of Tehran and the ensuing chorus of clerical attacks on the President. The result of the investigations of the three-man reconciliation committee that was set up by Khomeini on March 16 will probably be withheld from the public if it goes against the President as long as the war continues. The chances are, however, that neither this procedure, nor the one started by the State Prosecutor, Ayatollah Musavi Ardebili, will get off the ground. Ardebili's apparent determination to continue the process, despite "incompatibility" with Khomeini's guidelines of March 16, will probably wither on the vine in the name of "Islamic unity" or some such face-saving rhetoric. Bani-Sadr's interest in ending the war will surely be resisted by his opponents, but if the Islamic Conference Committee keeps the issue alive, the chances are that opposition will finally

be worn down. Khomeini's intervention in favor of accepting the Committee proposals after revision will be crucial. He will probably refrain from involving himself in it until Bani-Sadr and the Defense Council succeed in persuading Khomeini to do so. Khomeini's removal of Kafsanjani from the Council would aid Bani-Sadr considerably.

#### Relations with the Soviet Union

On the surface all kinds of factors seem to favor close relations between Iran and the Soviet Union. These include the revolutionary regime's overall non-alignment posture; Iran's continuing anti-American stance; the convergence of interests of both in opposing the U.S. Gulf policy, and the Soviet and Iranian anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian attitudes. However, powerful issues divide Tehran and Moscow. These include continuing differences over the price of natural gas; the Soviet disenchantment with the hostile Iranian attitude toward the Kurds, or for that matter toward other national minorities; the Soviet displeasure over the Iranian onslaught against the leftist elements, despite the tolerance of the Tudeh Party; and, above all, the Soviet anger over the defiant Iranian opposition to the occupation of Afghanistan and hostility toward the "atheistic" regime in Kabul.

From the Soviet perspective, the advantages of the Iranian anti-American frenzy, the polarization and radicalization of Iranian domestic politics, the relative freedom of activity of the Tudeh

Party, autonomist movements among the national minorities and other factors might outweigh any concerns that Moscow might have about the contagion of Islamic resurgence in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia and about the general instability of Iran in the Soviet "security zone." The dilemma of choosing sides in the Iraq-Iran war may appear to have been avoided by Moscow's formal impartiality, but its refusal to denounce Baghdad as "the aggressor," in the face of Iran's insistence, limits Soviet opportunity to woo Tehran. Moscow may well desire a settlement between Iraq and Iran today as it did in 1974-75 in order to get off the horn of the dilemma, but it is hard to believe that it can be oblivious to the possibility that such a settlement might strengthen the position of Bani-Sadr and his supporters whom it clearly dislikes. For Moscow the anti-American clergymen seem preferable, despite their strong anti-Soviet and anti-communist sentiments, to any decisive gain by "moderate" forces.

From the perspective of the revolutionary authorities in Iran, Soviet enticements can be used to consolidate power and Soviet blandishments can be simply ignored. For example, Moscow's offer of a transit agreement was welcomed, but its demand for "full reimbursement for the material damage" done to the Soviet Embassy by the Afghan refugees (December 27, 1979) has not yet seen the light of day. Moscow's fury with the nonchalant attitude of the Iranian authorities was communicated to the Iranian Ambassador (January 12, 1981) as follows: "In expressing formal regret for the incident in private, the Iranian government's



official representatives have, in effect, taken the thugs under their protection. Moreover, subsequent public statements by high-ranking Iranian officials not only failed to contain so much as a shadow of condemnation of the people who committed outrages against the Soviet Embassy, but actually portrayed the very acts of vandalism as some sort of inconsequential matter." The Soviets even threatened to protect their Embassy and their personnel themselves in the future if Iran should fail to do so. The contrast between this position and Moscow's attitude in the seizure of the American Embassy tells much about Soviet opportunism in Iran.

#### Relations with the United States

The American dilemma might not be totally dissimilar to that of the Soviet Union: how to normalize relations with Iran without appearing to take sides against the Arab states of the Gulf. If the Iranian rhetoric is to be taken for the perception of the revolutionary authorities, then there is no dilemma because Iran's "enemies are Saddam and America." And normalization of relations, from the Iranian perspective, would appear to be a non-issue. Immediately after the settlement of the hostage dispute, a number of powerful fundamentalists expressed the view that the release of the hostages paved the way for total elimination of all previous ties with the United States. But these and similar expressions can not be taken too seriously. The rhetoric has, in fact, already

cooled off considerably. Most recently, even the Ayatollah Khomeini pointed to internal disunity as the "principal enemy" rather than the United States. As in regard to any other foreign policy issue, the future attitude of the present revolutionary regime toward the United States will depend significantly on domestic developments in Iran. Assuming the continuation of the present circumstances during the life of Khomeini, the following points might be worth noting:

1. The implementation of the hostage agreement provides a ready-made opportunity for trying to improve, as far as possible, the climate of opinion between the two countries.

2. The fact of a large number of Iranian students in the United States might provide at least indirect opportunity for a dialogue.

3. The issue of the already contracted and paid-for military equipment can prove useful after the settlement of the Iraq-Iran armed conflict.

4. The Afghanistan issue can provide an opportunity for the U.S. to offer Iran information on matters of common concern between Washington and Tehran. The Iranian anti-American rhetoric should be balanced in the U.S. view by the recognition of a profound unspoken Iranian sense of being surrounded by the Soviet Union in the East as well as the North.

5. The Islamic Conference Committee mediation efforts, more than those of the Non-alignment Committee, should receive constant and quiet American support.

6. Regardless of all the rhetoric of "theomorphic self-defense,"

Iran still looks to the United States as the ultimate shield of its national security against the Soviet Union.

#### Iran's Foreign Policy Direction

The revolution has changed neither Iran's geography nor its historical memory. Short of a successful communist coup and the emergence of a government subservient to Moscow, Iran's non-aligned foreign policy in the near future will probably tilt toward Western Europe and Japan in the economic, technical and commercial fields. While the Indian example of non-alignment might appeal to many Iranians, it is interesting to note that Khomeini favors Japan as the model of an independent nation. Iran's geographic vulnerability vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, ancient anti-Russian sentiments and, at the moment, fierce anti-communist feelings make the Indian model unattractive. The signs of non-alignment, with a West-European technical and economic tilt, were already in evidence before the European participation in the American economic sanctions against the revolutionary regime. That participation naturally angered Tehran, as did the French reluctance to postpone the fulfillment of its previously concluded arms transactions with Baghdad despite the war. But Iran's own historical habit of turning to a third power in maintaining equidistance from great powers, together with the need for oil markets and hard currency and of imports of capital goods for economic development and much heralded and unfulfilled social justice will

exert considerable influence on the direction of Iran's tilt toward Western Europe and Japan.

Furthermore, the attraction of the Algerian model of non-alignment will prove difficult to resist. Of all the Third World nations, the Algerian revolutionary credentials look most impressive to the Iranian revolutionaries. Neither the Syrian nor the Libyan examples seems to appeal to Iran. The Iranian grudge against Libya over the fate of the Shi'i leader Musa Sadr is muted at the moment, largely because of Qadafi's support of Iran in the war with Iraq, but it is bound to surface as soon as the war is over. The Syrian connection is also attractive at the moment for the same reason. The wielders of power in Iran, however, probably believe in private that the Syrians have taken too deep a plunge into the Soviet pond, especially with the signing of their recent treaty with Moscow;

If there is any validity in this portrayal of the overall thrust of Iran's foreign policy in the near future, the United States' chances for establishing a semblance of correct relations with Iran over the years might not be too far-fetched. In the meantime, Washington would be well advised to maintain its present low profile toward Tehran. Subtle probing in areas mentioned before also seem advisable. All this would be consistent with the former President's statement of October 17, 1980. He said: "It is obvious to me that the dismemberment of Iran or the carving out of a part of Iran to be separated from the rest of it would not be in our interest." The Reagan Administration's decision to honor

the hostage agreements, inter alia, because of "long-term U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, including Iran" is basically inspired by the same historic and continuing American interest in Iran's territorial integrity and political independence that has influenced U.S. policy toward Iran since World War II.

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